Accomplishes Silence

The Modern Japanese Novel

by Masao Miyoshi

By the Japanese scholar Masao Miyoshi, "Accomplishes Silence: The Modern Japanese Novel" explores the development of the modern Japanese novel in the context of postwar Japan. Miyoshi argues that the novel's realism and its focus on individual experience reflect the social and political changes in Japan following World War II. The book is a detailed analysis of the novels of authors such as Natsume Soseki, Tanizaki Jun'ichiro, and others, examining their contributions to the modern Japanese novel.

Pillow of Grass employs a unique visual effect that contributes to the painterly quality of its narrative (the narrator is, in fact, an artist). Some passages need to "be seen, not heard, to be understood" (56), due to very obscure Chinese characters that few of its Japanese speaking readers would be able to pronounce.

Miyoshi finds a persistent source of difficulty for the Japanese novel—indeed, for Japanese novels—in what he describes as a rigidly hierarchical, strictly rule-defined society and a consequent "poverty of content in Japanese life." The Japanese society, he argues, represents the development of individual personality that is by definition a prerequisite for the novelistic imagination as well as mixture for characters and authors alike. Paradoxically, the Japanese audience's typical genre of the "novel" or the "short story" evolves out of this very factor, substituting the mother's private world for what is traditionally a network of relationships among individuals. For Miyoshi, however, the novel generally suffers as a type of novel for its dearth of clear personalities. He observes in it a parallel for the literary suicide phenomenon: once the writer's life is mined of its content, suicide offers the only alternative to numbing redundancy.

It would not seem fair to judge Miyoshi for his recuse in 1974, when the book was originally published, to what these dates stress criticism in an allegedly conditioned view of Japanese society as uniquely homogeneous and anti-individualistic. In his subsequent Off the Map: The Modern Japanese Novel and the United States (Cambridge: Harvard, 1991) and with Postmodernism and the Novel (Durham: Duke University Press, 1989), he has provided a more nuanced view of Japan's literary output, recognizing the diversity of its writers and their contributions to the novel as a genre.

Pillow of Grass is a significant work in the Japanese novel's development, offering insights into the cultural and social context of modern Japan. Miyoshi's analysis provides a valuable perspective on the evolution of the Japanese novel and its place within global literary traditions. The book is highly recommended for students of Japanese literature and for anyone interested in the development of the modern novel. 

Passage Pacific

The Study of American-East Asian Relations on the Eve of the Twenty-First Century

Warren I. Cohen, ed.

New York and Chichester, West Sussex: Columbia University Press, 1996

407 pages + index

Cohen's introduction and Ernest R. May's epilogue.

Second, the historiographic "research agenda" (viii) is elastic, that is, susceptible to being stretched to fit competing political purposes. Indeed, this agenda often reflects domestic political priorities, not only in the U.S., but also in China, Japan, and elsewhere. Thus, even "the definition and periodization of historical fields are always problematic," according to William C. Kirby (163), partly because the focused time frames (periods) may reflect the needs, problems, and accomplishments of a government at particular historical junctures. In a more specific criticism, Bruce Cumings wonders why presumably independent academics express "ethical enthusiasm" over the immense sacrifice that the Koreans made to defend their country into the late twentieth century (162).

By highlighting appropriate references in chapters 1-3, 7, 9-11 and 13 of Pacific Passage, teachers can show how historical research sometimes depends on the availability of secret documents while also underscoring important references made from open-source materials. Some students may be inspired by the ingenuity of scholars who make new inquiries or challenge answers to once-settled questions. Surprisingly, the potentially proactive role of historians in triggering fresh information acts can be supported.

Third, Pacific Passage introduces undergraduates to the notion that bilateral and multilateral U.S. relations are often poorly understood if one only considers the perspectives of American political, diplomatic, or military leaders, that is, if "the government" always has a unified set of preferences or if the government is always the only American institution affecting U.S. relations with countries in East and Southeast Asia. To cite a few examples, the reader is introduced to relevant perspectives of students (9), teachers (40-41), traders (121-24), women missionaries (130-31), newspaper reporters (24, 132, 154) and priests (pre- and post-Harbor diplomatic interrogations 102, 194). Chapters by Charles W. Hayford on "Chinese-American Cultural Relations, 1900-45" and Gordon Chang on "Asian Immigrants and American Foreign Relations" provide a counterpoint to state-centric analyses of foreign policy. The domestic politics of governmental foreign policy, i.e., the external affairs preferences of governmental officials, receives attention, as do other dimensions of society-to-society foreign relations. Professor Chang claims that "the Second World War appears to be a turning point in the study of Pacific-East Asian relations," and "the classics of the studies of the war in the Pacific" is, its aftermath and its aftermath that were completed in the immediate postwar period gave relatively little attention to the immigration question or even to its legacy in American-East Asian relations" (106).

One might also look for additional links between a country's internal political and its external relations with other governments. For example, students might be assigned to assess and discuss the changing impact of newspapers, film, radio, television, and most recently, the Internet, on United States relations with governments in East and Southeast Asia. Ernest R. May is the only contributor to Pacific Passage (1996) to "the continuing revolution in telecommunications" (335-36) in relation to the development of U.S. foreign policy.

Fourth, essays in Pacific Passage suggest, in turn, how...